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Coalition Files Petition to Protect Historic Blair Mountain Battlefield from Surface Coal Mining

Charleston, West Virginia – A broad coalition of community, environmental, historic preservation and labor history groups filed a petition today to protect the site of the largest civil uprising in America after the Civil War from surface coal mining. The petition was filed today by the Sierra Club, National Trust for Historic Preservation, Friends of Blair Mountain, the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition, the West Virginia Labor History Association, and the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. It states that the Blair Mountain Battlefield should be deemed unsuitable for surface coal mining by the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection due to its historical significance, natural beauty and the important archaeological sites located there.

Blair Mountain was the site of a historic clash between coal miners seeking to unionize and management and local law enforcement that put a violent end to their efforts. From August 25 to September 2, 1921, the two sides fought a series of violent battles. This significant event in the history of the U.S. labor movement was only brought to a close by the intervention of federal troops by Presidential order. Last year, Blair Mountain was removed from the National Register of Historic Places.

“Blair Mountain is a critical piece of West Virginia's history,” said **Bill Price, a local Sierra Club organizer**. “It should stand as a historic reminder of the sacrifices that miners were forced to make to fuel America and should be protected from destructive, unsustainable and job killing mountain top removal mining.”

From June 6-11, activists from across the country will converge on Blair Mountain to re-enact the historic miners' march to celebrate the 90th anniversary. The march will culminate in a rally to call for an end to mountaintop removal mining, support of labor rights, the preservation of Blair Mountain and sustainable job creation.

“This is more than a West Virginian crisis. This is an environmental crisis and a historical crisis,” said **Barbara Rasmussen, president of Friends of Blair Mountain**. “Every person in America who has a steady job, a decent wage, and health and retirement benefits owes his or her well being to the brave miners who stood to demand basic human dignity, human rights and safe working conditions in the coal mining industry. Sid Hatfield and the other men who died for workers’ rights in the coal fields and

elsewhere deserve the respect that will come from commemorating this mountain as the profoundly historically significant place that it is. I believe it is a terrible act of social violence to tear down other people's monuments, particularly when they can never be restored. Blair Mountain should be sacred to working people everywhere."

"Blair Mountain is a nationally significant historic place that must be protected for future generations," said **Rob Nieweg, director of the Southern Field Office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation**. "We hope that the State of West Virginia will respond favorably to our petition and help us safeguard the battlefield for all Americans."

Named by the National Trust for Historic Preservation as one of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places in 2006, the fight to save Blair Mountain dates back many years. Several groups filed suit last fall requesting that Blair Mountain be returned to the National Register of Historic Places. The site remains eligible for listing.

Regina Hendrix from the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition said, "There are some places that are so sacred to our state and national history that they must be deemed as off limits to destructive surface coal mining. What tourist would want to visit the desolate landscape left behind by strip mining?"

"Allowing Blair Mountain to be destroyed is akin to suggesting that we blow up and bulldoze Harpers Ferry," said **Gordon Simmons of the West Virginia Labor History Association**. "The reasons for preserving Blair Mountain are so numerous and obvious that we ought to begin asking why, for what purpose, anyone would seriously want its destruction."

The petition, which was directed to Randy Huffman, the Secretary of the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection, requests that Blair Mountain be designated as lands unsuitable for surface coal mining under the West Virginia Surface Coal Mining and Reclamation Act. The law provides that where mining operations could result in significant damage to important historic lands or where reclamation is not technologically or economically feasible, the DEP may set aside these lands from surface coal mining.

"Blair Mountain is an important part of my family's history," said **Julian Martin of the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy**. "My grandfather and great uncle fought at Blair Mountain in 1921 on the side of the United Mine Workers of America. It would be a huge loss for Blair Mountain to be unprotected from mountain top removal strip mining."

The petition was filed by attorney Derek Teaney from the Appalachian Center for the Economy and the Environment, and attorney Jessica Yarnall from the Sierra Club.

For more information on Blair Mountain, visit:

<http://www.sierraclub.org/environmentallaw/lawsuits/0312.aspx>

<http://www.friendsofblairmountain.org/index.html>

<http://www.preservationnation.org/>

www.ohvec.org

<http://www.wvhighlands.org/>

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